

## REVIEW

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# Uniqueness and value distribution for difference operators of meromorphic function

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## Abstract

We investigate the value distribution of difference operator for meromorphic functions. In addition, we study the sharing value problems related to a meromorphic function  $f(z)$  and its shift  $f(z+c)$ .

## 1 Introduction and main results

A meromorphic function means meromorphic in the whole complex plane. We assume that the reader is familiar with standard symbols and fundamental results of Nevanlinna Theory [1]. As usual, the abbreviation CM stands for “counting multiplicities”, while IM means “ignoring multiplicities”, and we denote the order of meromorphic function  $f$  by  $\sigma(f)$ . For a non-constant meromorphic function  $f$  and a set  $S$  of complex numbers, we define the set  $E(S, f) = \cup_{a \in S} \{z | f(z) - a = 0\}$ , where a zero of  $f - a$  with multiplicity  $m$  counts  $m$  times in  $E(S, f)$ .

We define difference operator as  $\Delta_c f = f(z+c) - f(z)$ , where  $c$  is a non-zero constant. In particular, we denote by  $S(f)$  the family of all meromorphic functions  $a(z)$  that satisfy  $T(r, a) = S(r, f) = o(T(r, f))$ , where  $r \rightarrow \infty$  outside a possible exceptional set of finite logarithmic measure. For convenience, we set  $\hat{S}(f) := S(f) \cup \{\infty\}$ .

The difference Nevanlinna theory and its applications to the uniqueness theory have become a subject of great interest [2-4], recently. With these fundamental results, Heittokangas et al. considered a meromorphic function  $f(z)$  sharing values with its shift  $f(z+c)$ , we recall a key result from [5].

**Theorem A** [[5], Theorem 2]. *Let  $f$  be a non-constant meromorphic function of finite order, let  $c \in \mathbb{C}$ , and let  $a, b, c \in \hat{S}(f)$  be three distinct periodic functions with period  $c$ . If  $f(z)$  and  $f(z+c)$  share  $a, b$  CM and  $c$  IM, then  $f(z) = f(z+c)$  for all  $z \in \mathbb{C}$ .*

Recently, Yang and Liu and one of the present authors [6] considered the case  $F = f^n$ , where  $f$  is a meromorphic function, assuming value sharing with  $F$  and  $F(z+c)$ :

**Theorem B** [[6], Theorem 1.4]. *Let  $f$  be a non-constant meromorphic function of finite order,  $n \geq 7$  be an integer, let  $c \in \mathbb{C}$ , and let  $F = f^n$ . If  $F(z)$  and  $F(z+c)$  share  $a \in S(f) \setminus \{0\}$  and  $\infty$  CM, then  $f(z) = \omega f(z+c)$ , for a constant  $\omega$  that satisfies  $\omega^n = 1$ .*

Next, we consider the problem that related to the Theorem B, and have the following result, where  $a$  is a periodic function with period  $c$ . However, our proof is different to the one in [6].

**Theorem 1.1.** *Let  $f$  be a non-constant meromorphic function of finite order, let  $c \in \mathbb{C}$ , and let  $a \in S(f) \setminus \{0\}$  be a periodic function with period  $c$ . If  $f(z)^n$  and  $f(z+c)^n$  share  $a$*

and  $\infty$  CM, and  $n \geq 4$  is an integer, then  $f(z) = \omega f(z+c)$ , for a constant  $\omega$  that satisfies  $\omega^n = 1$ .

**Remarks.**

- (1) Theorem 1.1 is not true, if  $a = 0$ . This can be seen by considering  $f(z) = e^{z^2}$ . Then  $f(z)^n$  and  $f(z+c)^n$  share 0 and  $\infty$  CM, however,  $f(z) \neq \omega f(z+c)$ , where  $n$  is a positive integer.
- (2) Theorem 1.1 does not remain valid when  $n = 1$ . For example,  $f(z) = e^z + 1$  and  $f(z+c) = e^{z+c} + 1$ , where  $c \neq 2\pi i$ . Clearly,  $f(z)$  and  $f(z+c)$  share 1 and  $\infty$  CM, however,  $f(z) \neq \omega f(z+c)$  for  $\omega^n = 1$ . Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in reducing the condition  $n \geq 4$  to  $n \geq 2$  in Theorem 1.1, and we also cannot give a counterexample when  $n = 2, 3$  at present.
- (3) We give an example to show that the restriction of finite order in Theorem 1.1 cannot be deleted. This can be seen by taking  $f(z) = e^{e^z}$ ,  $ne^c = -1$ . Then  $f(z)^n$  and  $f(z+c)^n$  share 1 and  $\infty$  CM, however,  $f(z) \neq \omega f(z+c)$ , where  $n$  is a positive integer.

In 1976, Gross asked the following question [[7], Question 6]:

**Question.** Can one find (even one set) finite sets  $S_j$  ( $j = 1, 2$ ) such that any two entire functions  $f$  and  $g$  satisfying  $E(S_j, f) = E(S_j, g)$  ( $j = 1, 2$ ) must be identical?

Since then, many results have been obtained for this and related topics (see [8-11]). We recall the following result given by Yi [9].

**Theorem C** [[9], **Theorem 1**]. Let  $S_1 = \{\omega \mid \omega^n + a\omega^{n-1} + b = 0\}$ , where  $n \geq 7$  is an integer,  $a$  and  $b$  are two non-zero constants such that the algebraic equation  $\omega^n + a\omega^{n-1} + b = 0$  has no multiple roots. If  $f$  and  $g$  are two entire functions satisfying  $E(S_1, f) = E(S_1, g)$ , then  $f = g$ .

Afterwards, Fang and Lahiri [12] got the result for meromorphic functions.

**Theorem D** [[12], **Theorem 1**]. Let  $S_1$  be defined as Theorem C and  $S_2 = \{\infty\}$ . Assume that  $f$  and  $g$  are two meromorphic functions satisfying  $E(S_j, f) = E(S_j, g)$  for  $j = 1, 2$ . If  $f$  has no simple poles and  $n \geq 7$ , then  $f = g$ .

Next, we give a difference analog of Theorem D that replacing  $g$  with  $f(z+c)$ , and obtain the following result.

**Theorem 1.2.** Let  $S_1$  be defined as Theorem C and  $S_2 = \{\infty\}$ . Assume that  $f$  is a meromorphic function of finite order satisfying  $E(S_j, f) = E(S_j, f(z+c))$  for  $j = 1, 2$ . If  $n \geq 6$  and  $\overline{N}(r, f) < \frac{n-3}{n-1}T(r, f) + S(r, f)$ , then  $f(z) = f(z+c)$  for all  $z \in \mathbb{C}$ .

We investigate the value distribution of difference polynomials of meromorphic (entire) functions. Let  $f$  be a transcendental meromorphic function, and let  $n$  be a positive integer. Concerning to the value distribution of  $f^n f^c$ , Hayman [[13], Corollary to Theorem 9] proved that  $f^n f^c$  takes every non-zero complex value infinitely often if  $n \geq 3$ . Mues [[14], Satz 3] proved that  $f^2 f^c - 1$  has infinitely many zeros. Later on, Bergweiler and Eremenko [[15], Theorem 2] showed that  $ff^c - 1$  has infinitely many zeros also. As an analog result in difference, Laine and Yang [16] investigated the value distribution of difference products of entire functions, and obtained the following:

**Theorem E** [[16], **Theorem 2**]. *Let  $f$  be a transcendental entire function of finite order, and let  $c$  be a non-zero complex constant. Then for  $n \geq 2$ ,  $f(z)^n f(z+c)$  assumes every non-zero value  $a \in \mathbb{C}$  infinitely often.*

In a recent article, one of the present authors considered the value distribution of  $f(z)^n (f(z) - 1) f(z+c)$ , the result may be stated as follows:

**Theorem F** [[17], **Theorem 1**]. *Let  $f$  be a transcendental meromorphic function of finite order  $\sigma(f)$ , let  $a \neq 0$  be a small function with respect to  $f$ , and let  $c$  be a non-zero complex constant. If the exponent of convergence of the poles of  $f$  satisfies  $\lambda(\frac{1}{f}) < \sigma(f)$  and  $n \geq 2$ , then  $f(z)^n (f - 1) f(z+c) - a$  has infinitely many zeros.*

In this article, we replace  $f(z+c)$  with  $\Delta_c f$ , and consider the value distribution of  $f(z)^n (f(z) - 1) \Delta_c f$ . We get the following results:

**Theorem 1.3.** *Let  $f$  be a transcendental meromorphic function of finite order  $\sigma(f)$  and  $\Delta_c f \neq 0$ , let  $a \neq 0$  be a small function with respect to  $f$ , and let  $c$  be a non-zero complex constant. If the exponent of convergence of the poles of  $f$  satisfies  $\lambda(\frac{1}{f}) < \sigma(f)$  and  $n \geq 3$ , then  $f(z)^n (f - 1) \Delta_c f - a$  has infinitely many zeros.*

**Corollary 1.4.** *Let  $f$  be a transcendental entire function of finite order and  $\Delta_c f \neq 0$ , let  $a \neq 0$  be a small function with respect to  $f$ , and let  $c$  be a non-zero complex constant. Then for  $n \geq 3$ ,  $f(z)^n (f - 1) \Delta_c f - a$  has infinitely many zeros.*

In particular, if  $a$  is a non-zero polynomial in Corollary 1.4, then Corollary 1.4 can be improved.

**Theorem 1.5.** *Let  $f$  be a transcendental entire function of finite order and  $\Delta_c f \neq 0$ , let  $a$  be a non-zero polynomial, and let  $c$  be a non-zero complex constant. Then for  $n \geq 2$ ,  $f(z)^n (f - 1) \Delta_c f - a$  has infinitely many zeros.*

## 2 Preliminary lemmas

**Lemma 2.1.** [[4], Theorem 2.1] *Let  $f$  be a meromorphic function of finite order, and let  $c \in \mathbb{C}$  and  $\delta \in (0, 1)$ . Then*

$$m\left(r, \frac{f(z+c)}{f(z)}\right) + m\left(r, \frac{f(z)}{f(z+c)}\right) = o\left(\frac{T(r, f)}{r^\delta}\right) = S(r, f).$$

Chiang and Feng have obtained similar estimates for the logarithmic difference [[3], Corollary 2.5], and this study is independent from [4].

**Lemma 2.2.** [[4], Lemma 2.3] *Let  $f$  be a meromorphic function of finite order and  $c \in \mathbb{C}$ . Then for any small function  $a \in S(f)$  with period  $c$ ,*

$$m\left(r, \frac{\Delta_c f}{f - a}\right) = S(r, f).$$

**Lemma 2.3.** [[3], Theorem 2.1] *Let  $f$  be a meromorphic function of finite order  $\sigma(f)$ , and let  $c$  be a non-zero constant. Then, for each  $\varepsilon > 0$ , we have*

$$T(r, f(z+c)) = T(r, f(z)) + O(r^{\sigma(f)-1+\varepsilon}) + O(\log r).$$

**Lemma 2.4.** [[18], Theorem 2.4.2] *Let  $f$  be a transcendental meromorphic solution of*

$$f^n A(z, f) = B(z, f),$$

where  $A(z, f)$ ,  $B(z, f)$  are differential polynomials in  $f$  and its derivatives with small meromorphic coefficients  $a_\lambda$ , in the sense of  $m(r, a_\lambda) = S(r, f)$  for all  $\lambda \in I$ . If the  $\deg(B(z, f)) \leq n$ , then  $m(r, A(z, f)) = S(r, f)$ .

**Lemma 2.5.** Let  $f$  be a finite order entire function and  $\Delta_c f \neq 0$ , and let  $c$  be a non-zero constant. Then

$$m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) \geq T(r, f) + S(r, f).$$

*Proof.* Since  $f$  is an entire function with finite order, we deduce from Lemma 2.2 and the Lemma of logarithmic derivative that

$$\begin{aligned} 3T(r, f) &= T(r, f^3) = m(r, f^3) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq m\left(r, \frac{f^3}{ff' \Delta_c f}\right) + m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) + S(r, f) \\ &= m\left(r, \frac{f^2}{f' \Delta_c f}\right) + m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq T\left(r, \frac{f'}{f}\right) + T\left(r, \frac{\Delta_c f}{f}\right) + m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq 2N\left(r, \frac{1}{f}\right) + m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq 2T(r, f) + m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) + S(r, f). \end{aligned}$$

Hence, we get

$$m(r, ff' \Delta_c f) \geq T(r, f) + S(r, f). \quad (1)$$

### 3 Proof of Theorem 1.1

Since  $f(z)^n$  and  $f(z+c)^n$  share  $a$  and  $\infty$  CM, we obtain that

$$\frac{f(z+c)^n - a(z+c)}{f(z)^n - a(z)} = e^{Q(z)}, \quad (2)$$

where  $Q(z)$  is a polynomial. From Lemma 2.1, we know that  $T(r, e^{Q(z)}) = m(r, e^{Q(z)}) = S(r, f)$ . Rewrite (2) as

$$f(z+c)^n = e^{Q(z)}(f(z)^n - a(z) + a(z)e^{-Q(z)}). \quad (3)$$

Set

$$G(z) = \frac{f(z)^n}{a(z)(1 - e^{-Q(z)})}.$$

If  $e^{Q(z)} \not\equiv 1$ , then we apply the Valiron-Mohon'ko theorem and the second main theorem to  $G(z)$ , and get

$$\begin{aligned} nT(r, f) + S(r, f) &= T(r, G) \leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{G}\right) + \overline{N}(r, G) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{G-1}\right) + S(r, G) \\ &\leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{f}\right) + \overline{N}(r, f) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{f(z)^n - a(z) + a(z)e^{-Q(z)}}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{f}\right) + \overline{N}(r, f) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{f(z+c)}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq 2T(r, f) + T(r, f(z+c)) + S(r, f). \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Combining (4) with Lemma 2.3, we get

$$nT(r, f) \leq 3T(r, f) + O(r^{\sigma(f)-1+\varepsilon}) + S(r, f),$$

which contradicts that  $n \geq 4$ . Therefore,  $e^{Q(z)} \equiv 1$ , that is,  $f(z)^n = f(z+c)^n$ , so we have  $f(z) = \omega f(z+c)$ , for a constant  $\omega$  with  $\omega^n = 1$ .

#### 4 Proof of Theorem 1.2

From the assumption of Theorem 1.2, we get that

$$\frac{f(z+c)^n + af(z+c)^{n-1} + b}{f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1} + b} = e^{Q(z)}, \quad (5)$$

where  $Q(z)$  is a polynomial. Applying Lemma 2.1, we obtain that  $T(r, e^{Q(z)}) = m(r, e^{Q(z)}) = S(r, f)$ . Rewrite (5) as

$$f(z+c)^n + af(z+c)^{n-1} = e^{Q(z)} \left( f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1} + b - \frac{b}{e^{Q(z)}} \right). \quad (6)$$

If  $e^{Q(z)} \not\equiv 1$ , applying the second main theorem for three small functions, we get

$$\begin{aligned} nT(r, f) + S(r, f) &= T(r, f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1}) \\ &\leq \overline{N} \left( r, \frac{1}{f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1}} \right) + \overline{N}(r, f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1}) \\ &\quad + \overline{N} \left( r, \frac{1}{f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1} + b - \frac{b}{e^{Q(z)}}} \right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq \overline{N}(r, f) + \overline{N} \left( r, \frac{1}{f(z+c)^{n-1}(f(z+c) + a)} \right) \\ &\quad + \overline{N} \left( r, \frac{1}{f(z)^{n-1}(f(z) + a)} \right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq 3T(r, f) + 2T(r, f(z+c)) + S(r, f). \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

Combining (4.3) with Lemma 2.3, we get

$$nT(r, f) \leq 5T(r, f) + O(r^{\sigma(f)-1+\varepsilon}) + S(r, f),$$

which contradicts  $n \geq 6$ . Hence,  $e^{Q(z)} \equiv 1$ , we conclude by (5) that

$$f(z+c)^n + af(z+c)^{n-1} = f(z)^n + af(z)^{n-1}. \quad (8)$$

Set  $G(z) = \frac{f(z)}{f(z+c)}$ . If  $G(z)$  is non-constant, then we have from (8)

$$f(z) = -\frac{aG(G^{n-1} - 1)}{G^n - 1} = -a \frac{G^{n-1} + \dots + G}{G^{n-1} + \dots + 1}. \quad (9)$$

Making use of the standard Valiron-Mohon'ko lemma, we get from (9) that

$$T(r, f) = (n-1)T(r, G) + S(r, f). \quad (10)$$

Noting that  $n \geq 6$ , we deduce that 1 is not a Picard value of  $G^n$ . Suppose that  $a_j \in \{\mathbb{C} \setminus 1\}$  ( $j = 1, 2, \dots, n-1$ ) are the distinct roots of equation  $h^n - 1 = 0$ . Applying the second main theorem to  $G$ , we conclude by (9) that

$$(n-3)T(r, G) \leq \sum_{j=1}^{n-1} \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{G-a_j}\right) + S(r, G) = \overline{N}(r, f). \quad (11)$$

From (10) and (11), we get  $\overline{N}(r, f) \geq \frac{n-3}{n-1}T(r, f) + S(r, f)$ , which contradicts the assumption.

So  $G(z)$  is a constant, and we get  $f(z) = tf(z+c)$ , where  $t$  is a non-zero constant. From (8), we know  $t = 1$ , therefore,  $f = g$ .

### 5 Proof of Theorem 1.3

The main idea of this proof is from [[17], Theorem 1], while the details are somewhat different. For the convenience of the reader, we give a complete proof.

Set  $F(z) = f^n(z)(f(z)-1)\Delta_c f$ . Since  $f$  is a transcendental meromorphic function with finite order  $\sigma(f)$ , we conclude by Lemma 2.3 that

$$\begin{aligned} T(r, F) &\leq T(r, f^n(z)(f(z)-1)) + T(r, \Delta_c f) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq (n+2)T(r, f) + T(r, f(z+c)) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq (n+3)T(r, f) + O(r^{\sigma(f)-1+\varepsilon}) + S(r, f). \end{aligned}$$

Thus, we get  $S(r, F) = o(T(r, f)) = S(r, f)$ . Moreover, we get

$$\begin{aligned} T(r, \Delta_c f) &\leq m(r, \Delta_c f) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq m\left(r, \frac{\Delta_c f}{f}\right) + m(r, f) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq T(r, f) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f). \end{aligned} \quad (12)$$

On the other hand, we deduce by Lemma 2.2 that

$$\begin{aligned} (n+2)T(r, f) &= T(r, f^{n+1}(f-1)) + S(r, f) \\ &= m(r, f^{n+1}(f-1)) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq m\left(r, \frac{f^{n+1}(f-1)}{F}\right) + m(r, F) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq T\left(r, \frac{\Delta_c f}{f}\right) + m(r, F) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq m\left(r, \frac{\Delta_c f}{f}\right) + N\left(r, \frac{1}{f}\right) + m(r, F) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq T(r, f) + T(r, F) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f). \end{aligned}$$

Hence

$$(n+1)T(r, f) \leq T(r, F) + O\left(r^{\lambda(\frac{1}{f})+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f). \quad (13)$$

The second main theorem yields

$$\begin{aligned} T(r, F) &\leq \overline{N}(r, F) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{F}\right) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{F-a}\right) + S(r, F) \\ &\leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{F-a}\right) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{f}\right) + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{f-1}\right) \\ &\quad + \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{\Delta_c f}\right) + O\left(r^{\lambda\left(\frac{1}{f}\right)+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f) \\ &\leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{F-a}\right) + 2T(r, f) + T(r, \Delta_c f) + O\left(r^{\lambda\left(\frac{1}{f}\right)+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f). \end{aligned}$$

From (12) and above inequality, we get that

$$T(r, F) \leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{F-a}\right) + 3T(r, f) + O\left(r^{\lambda\left(\frac{1}{f}\right)+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f). \quad (14)$$

Combining (13) and (14), we have

$$(n-2)T(r, f) \leq \overline{N}\left(r, \frac{1}{F-a}\right) + O\left(r^{\lambda\left(\frac{1}{f}\right)+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f),$$

which is a contradiction to the fact that  $f$  is of order  $\sigma(f)$  if  $F-a$  has finitely many zeros. The conclusion follows.

## 6 Proof of Theorem 1.5

Suppose that  $f^n(f-1)\Delta_c f - a$  admits finitely many zeros only. Then, there are two non-zero polynomials  $P(z)$ ,  $Q(z)$  such that

$$f^n(f-1)\Delta_c f - a = P(z)e^{Q(z)}. \quad (15)$$

Differentiating (15) and eliminating  $e^{Q(z)}$ , we obtain

$$(f^n - f^{n-1})F(z, f) = a'P(z) - aP^*(z) - P(z)f(z)^{n-1}f'(z)\Delta_c f, \quad (16)$$

where

$$F(z, f) = (n+1)P(z)f'(z)\Delta_c f + P(z)f(z)(\Delta_c f)' - P^*(z)f(z)\Delta_c f$$

and  $P^*(z) = P'(z) + P(z)Q'(z)$ .

First, we conclude that  $a'P(z) - aP^*(z) \not\equiv 0$ . Otherwise, if  $a'P(z) - aP^*(z) = 0$ , by integrating, then we have

$$\frac{a}{P(z)} = Ae^{Q(z)},$$

where  $A$  is a non-zero constant. Hence, we get  $e^{Q(z)}$  is a constant and

$$f^n(z)(f(z)-1)\Delta_c f = BP(z) + a, \quad (17)$$

where  $B$  is a non-zero constant. Then, from Lemma 2.3 and (17), we obtain that

$$(n+1)T(r, f) \leq 2T(r, f) + O\left(r^{\sigma(f)-1+\varepsilon}\right) + S(r, f),$$

which is a contradiction when  $n \geq 2$ .

If  $F(z, f)$  vanish identically, then

$$aP^*(z) + P(z)f(z)^{n-1}f'(z)\Delta_c f - a'P(z) \equiv 0. \quad (18)$$

Rewrite (18), we get

$$f^{n-2}ff'(z)\Delta_c f = \frac{a'P(z) - aP^*(z)}{P(z)},$$

hence

$$f^{n-2}f^2f'(z)\frac{\Delta_c f}{f} = \frac{a'P(z) - aP^*(z)}{P(z)}. \quad (19)$$

Then, combining Lemmas 2.2, 2.4 and Equation (19), we conclude that

$$m(r, ff'(z)\Delta_c f) = S(r, f),$$

which contradicts (1).

It remains to consider the case that  $F(z, f) \not\equiv 0$ . We rewrite (16) in the form that

$$(f(z)^{n+2} - f(z)^{n+1})\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2} = a'P(z) - aP^*(z) - P(z)f(z)^{n-1}f'(z)\Delta_c f \quad (20)$$

and

$$f(z)^{n+1} \left( (f(z) - 1)\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2} \right) = a'P(z) - aP^*(z) - P(z)f(z)^{n-1}\frac{f'(z)\Delta_c f}{f(z)^2}.$$

By Lemmas 2.2 and 2.4, we know that

$$m\left(r, \frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}\right) = S(r, f)$$

and

$$m\left(r, (f(z) - 1)\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}\right) = S(r, f).$$

As  $f(z)$  is entire, we get that the poles of  $\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}$  may be located only at the zeros of  $f(z)$ . If  $\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}$  has infinitely many poles, then from that a zero of  $f(z)$  with multiplicity  $t$  should be a pole of  $t + 1$  of  $\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}$ . Since  $n \geq 2$ , we know that the left side of (20) must have infinitely many zeros, which is a contradiction that  $a'P(z) - aP^*(z)$  is a non-zero polynomial. We get

$$N\left(r, \frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}\right) = O(\log r) \quad \text{and} \quad N\left(r, (f(z) - 1)\frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}\right) = O(\log r).$$

Hence

$$T\left(r, \frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}\right) = S(r, f)$$



and

$$T\left(r, (f(z) - 1) \frac{F(z, f)}{f(z)^2}\right) = S(r, f)$$

as well. Combining these two estimates, we obtain

$$T(r, f) = S(r, f)$$

contradiction. This completes the proof of Theorem 1.5.

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#### Authors' contributions

XQ completed the main part of this article, JD and LY corrected the main theorems. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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